

# OpenTheo

## Challenges to Total Depravity (Part 2)



### God's Sovereignty and Man's Salvation - Steve Gregg

In this segment, Steve Gregg challenges the idea of total depravity from a Calvinistic perspective. He argues that people have the ability to choose good and refuse evil, citing Proverbs 1:28-30 and Isaiah 66:3 as evidence. He also points out that many verses throughout Scripture suggest that individuals have the opportunity to glorify God without excuse. Gregg believes that regeneration does not necessarily come before faith and cites Acts 16:31 and Ephesians 1:13 as evidence. Finally, he questions why God would blind and harden individuals who are already in a state of depravity.

### Transcript

In this session we need to finish up our cross-examination of the doctrine of total depravity. We first saw the scriptural case for total depravity and the other four points. Then, in our last session, we cross-examined the scriptural case that seems to teach total depravity.

I hope it became evident that actually those verses that are used don't make such an iron-clad case as it sounds at first. When you just hear those verses in a stream, you kind of get overwhelmed. Whoa, they must be right.

When you look at the verses one by one or in groups that are similar to each other and say, well, what's the context here? What is he really getting at? Is he trying to make that point? I think that even if somebody still believes in total depravity, they have to admit that those verses can be reasonably seen in another way, and in my opinion, more reasonably in another way. But then there's another whole way to go, and that's scriptures that deny the claims of total depravity. Which means if these scriptures really do deny total depravity, then an interpretation of that earlier group of scriptures that is different than interpreting them for total depravity must be required.

Because the scripture can't contradict itself. Oh, I didn't lose you with that strange sentence. Okay, let's look at Deuteronomy chapter 30.

Now remember, if total depravity is true in the New Testament, it is in the Old Testament too. It's a human condition since the fall. So it would be just as true in Old Testament

times as New.

It wasn't the coming of the gospel that made man totally depraved. If he's totally depraved, it was the fall. And therefore Moses, if the doctrine is true, is writing to people, many of whom are totally depraved.

Now you might say, but wait, he's talking to Israel. Aren't they God's chosen people? Yep, and most of them were sinners. Most of them were unbelievers.

Most Israelites were not of the faithful remnant. He's addressing the whole nation of which most were rebels against God in much of their lives. Deuteronomy 30 verses 11 through 14 and then verse 19.

For this commandment which I command you today, Moses said, is not too difficult for you. Now I put an asterisk by difficult because that word is translated differently in some places. Some translations say, not too mysterious for you, which is really something, a different meaning altogether it would seem.

But the ESV and the New RSV render it too hard for you. New King James renders it mysterious. The Young's literal translation says too wonderful for you.

So obviously mysterious or wonderful is a chosen translation by some. And hard or difficult is a chosen for another. The one I read to you is the New American Standard, which is one of the better translations for literalness.

It says, this commandment which I command you is not too difficult for you. This is not beyond your ability to obey, nor is it out of reach. Now if Moses thought that people who are unregenerated can't follow God, can't obey God, can't seek God, then those commandments would certainly be out of reach for them.

A person who is totally depraved in the sense that the Calvinist argues it, everything God has commanded is out of reach for the person who can't choose good, who can't repent or whatever. But that's not what Moses thought. He says, it's not in heaven that you should say who will go up to heaven for us and get it for us to make us hear it, that we may observe it, nor is it beyond the sea that you should say who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and to make us hear it that we may observe it.

But the word is very near to you in your mouth and in your heart that you may observe it. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I've set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants.

Now this is not written to a bunch of saved individuals except they've been their parents and they had been saved out of Egypt a generation earlier. But they weren't saved in the sense of they were all lovers of God, all believers. This was just a group of people.

Some of them were believers, some of them were not believers, but they were just Israelites wandering in the wilderness. And he says, I'm giving you some commands here. You can't tell me this is too hard for you.

They're not beyond your reach. You can't make lame excuses like saying, well, how can I know God's commands? I can't go up into heaven and bring them down. You can't be like the Gentiles who live far away and say, well, how can we know the commands? We can't cross the ocean to get them from the Israelites.

They came to you. God brought them down to you. He didn't give them to some people far away.

He gave them to you. You have no excuse. Gentiles who would have to cross the ocean to know God's commands, they might reasonably be excused for not knowing about it and not doing it.

If God hadn't brought them from heaven and we had to go up there to get them, well, we'd have some excuse for not knowing because we can't go up there and get them. But those excuses won't work for you. God has made it near you.

He's given it, he's put it on your lap. It's not beyond your reach. Certainly what Moses is saying is you are responsible to obey God because that's entirely possible for you to do.

And I'm telling you, choose life as if they could. In fact, throughout the scriptures, God is exhorting people, in most cases rebels, to choose to repent, to choose to obey, to choose to turn around. Every time he commands them to choose, if God actually knows that people are totally depraved in the Calvinistic sense, he's really just teasing.

He's really just dangling a carrot on a stick, saying, you're never going to get this, but I'm going to offer it to you anyway. I'm going to command you anyway. And I'm going to punish you if you don't.

It's like commanding that chair to go and cook breakfast. And if it doesn't do it, you take a hatchet to it and break it in pieces and throw it in the fire because it didn't do what you said. Well, that chair can't do that.

Of course, the chair would never feel the axe blade or the fire, but a human would. And for God to do that to human beings is a very strange thing for a sane and merciful God to do. And I can say that without any irreverence because I don't believe for a moment that that's what God does.

I don't believe for a moment that the Bible teaches that. God always treats sinners as if they really do have the choice and they'll be held accountable if they don't make the right one. Proverbs 1, 28 through 30.

This is wisdom speaking to the rebellious. It says, then they will call on me, but I will not answer. They will seek me diligently, but they will not find me because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord.

They would have none of my counsel and they despised my every rebuke. Now, this is an interesting passage because these are people who actually do seek, in this case, wisdom. But in Proverbs, wisdom means the wisdom of God.

In fact, most Christians would assume it's sort of a reference to Christ, it's the wisdom of God, because of 1 Corinthians 1, 30, it says Christ has become to us wisdom and sanctification and so forth. But the point here is, wisdom is personified speaking words such as God would speak. In fact, earlier in the passage says, you know, I will part my spirit upon you, I'll give you my words and you'll follow me.

And this is like things God or Jesus would say and wisdom is talking. But the time comes where wisdom says, but to the foolish, wisdom says, someday you're going to call on me, someday you're going to seek me diligently. What? I thought unregenerate people couldn't even want to do that.

These are not saved people. These are people God's going to ignore because it's too late. They'll seek the Lord while he might be found and call upon him while he's near.

So they'll seek him and call upon him when he isn't near and when he can't be found by them because they're too far gone and they're now under his judgment. Like Pharaoh, once God began to harden his heart, Pharaoh had times earlier in his life he could have repented, he didn't. God hardened his heart, he couldn't repent after that, couldn't change.

But the interesting thing here is that the assumption is that all these people are clearly not the elect. He says, you're going to seek me, it'll be unavailing, but it's clear that this is not teaching that people who are unregenerate don't have any interest or desire to seek God. Sometimes they do.

Sometimes it's too late. Isaiah 7, 15 and 16 talks about Christ. It's the verse right after, unto us a child is born, I'm sorry, not that verse, but the virgin shall conceive and bring forth a son, that verse.

It says, curds and honey shall he eat that he may know to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings. Now here's a reference to a child being born, and we won't get into the difficult parts of the passage, we'll just see what's taken for granted in the passage.

A child eventually reaches an age where they can choose the good and refuse the evil. This particular child will not reach that age before some other developments happen.

That's the prediction.

Within this time frame, a child's very early age, before they know, before they're morally responsible, before they reach an age of accountability, before that time this event with these kings is going to take place, it's a prophecy about something else, but it takes for granted that everybody knows when a child is born there comes a time when they reach the age where they can choose good and refuse evil. It sounds like the choosing of good is a great definition because they're sinners, of course they're sinners, but they reach an age where they could choose the good if they wish, or not. It doesn't give the slightest impression that choosing the good requires a special regeneration prior to that, or that choosing the evil is inevitable.

It makes it sound like it just means reaching the age where you've got enough common sense to make those kinds of choices. It sounds like it's part of human nature that babies don't know how to do it, but they reach a point where they do. Again, this is not trying to affirm anything except what people already know intuitively, and yet what we know intuitively is that Calvinism is wrong on this point.

People can choose good. Now, of course, Calvinists won't deny, they won't deny that some unsaved people choose to do things that are better than other things. For instance, the unsaved man who has the opportunity to seduce his secretary, but he says, no, I'm a married man, I won't do that, and he chooses to be faithful to his wife.

That's a good choice. But what the Calvinists will say is that no choice is truly good unless it's done with the motive of glorifying God. No act is truly good unless you do it for the glory of God.

And I'm not going to say that's altogether wrong. Any choice that's made that's selfishly motivated is tainted. It's tainted by sin.

But many people choose Christ, choose to repent, partly due to the fact that they are selfishly motivated. It's not the best reason, but it is a reason that some people choose. Even when Christ met Saul on the road to Damascus, he said, it's hard for you to kick against the goads.

You're hurting yourself. Wake up here. Don't you see I'm pricking your heart? Don't you see I've been goading you in a direction and you're fighting it like a cow kicking against the ox goad, against the cattle prod? You're hurting yourself.

The cattle prod's trying to get you to the right way and you're resisting and you just poke yourself, injure yourself. Don't you see that's what you're doing? Wake up. You're hurting yourself here.

I mean, there is a sense where, although Paul, as a Pharisee, wanted to please God, but every man has something in him that kind of wants to avoid pain too. And there is such a

thing as people making decisions, even that are not altogether selfless, but which are the right decisions that bring them closer to God and eventually even to repent of their sins. As Peter said to the people on the Day of Pentecost, save yourselves from this corrupt generation.

You know, turn, turn. Why will you die, said the Lord? You're going to die if you don't turn. To appeal to people's common sense.

For Jesus to say, it's better to cut off your hand or your foot or pluck out your eye than to retain that and be thrown into Gehenna. He's obviously saying some choices you can make here are bad for you, but following God, that's good for you. And so God does appeal to people's higher instincts of self-interest, but of course it's better if people make all their decisions just for the glory of God.

And that's something Christians need to work at as they grow. Even as Christians we should be motivated more by an interest in God's glory than what's in it for me. But that doesn't mean that you can't come to Christ at all without having that purest of all motives.

Isaiah 56, 4 through 5 says, Thus says the Lord, To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths and choose what pleases me and hold fast my covenant, even them I will give in my household within my walls, a place and a name better than sons and daughters, for I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off. Who? The eunuchs who keep my sabbaths and who choose what pleases God. Do people sometimes choose what doesn't please God? Isn't he kind of meticulously ordaining all choices that are made? I didn't put this in the notes for some reason.

It's later in the notes in a different context. But let me show you Isaiah if you've got your Bible there. Isaiah, in chapter 66, it says in verse 3, it says, He who kills a bull is as if he slays a man.

He who sacrifices a lamb is as if he breaks a dog's neck. He who offers grain offering it's as if he offered swine's blood. He who burns incense as if he blesses an idol.

Now what is he saying? He's saying you Jews, because your heart's so wrong, even though you're offering the right things, it's as if you're offering things that are detestable. This is something that Isaiah says in the very beginning of his book 2 in chapter 1. God, they're offering their sacrifices. They're offering a cow.

They're offering the right stuff, their grain. But to God they might as well be offering a human. They might as well be offering a pig.

They might as well be offering a dog. It's unclean, unacceptable. Their sacrifices are the right stuff, but they're unacceptable as if they were the wrong stuff.

Because your heart's wrong. And he says this, he goes on and says, Just as they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations, so I will choose their delusions and bring their fears upon them, because when I called, no one answered. When I spoke, they did not hear.

They did not realize, and they chose that in which I do not delight. Now God's blaming them for this. He's not saying, Yeah, yeah, it was inevitable.

You're totally depraved. What else can you do? He's saying, You made some choices here. You chose what was wrong, and I'm going to make a choice.

I'm going to choose how you're judged. You see, God does make choices that we can't change, but he bases them on what our choices already were. Because you chose your own ways, I will choose your consequences, because you chose what doesn't please me.

He's blaming them for that, and he is admitting that he is sovereign. I'm going to choose how this turns out for you, but it's not unconditional. It's because of what you have chosen earlier.

So God expects people to make better choices. In your notes again, Ezekiel 33, 11, Say to them, As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways.

For why should you die, O house of Israel? Obviously, he's saying, A. You should turn. B. Why haven't you done it? Why do you want to die? Well, if God was informed of Augustinian theology, he'd know why they will die, because they have no other choice in the matter. And he's really not a very good economist of his breath, because he wastes a lot of it telling people to repent, who can't? And if they can, he doesn't have to tell them, because they're going to inevitably do it anyway.

You see, the point here is, under Calvinism, you can't repent if you're not elect, and you can't not repent if you are elect. So why command someone to repent at all? They're going to inevitably if they're elect, and they're inevitably not going to if they're not. It's really kind of a strange behavior on God's part if he happens to be convinced of Calvinism.

I think he's unconvinced. Acts 17.30, Paul said to the Athenians on Mars Hill, truly these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all men everywhere to repent. That's a command to repent.

Now, the Calvinist doesn't deny that. They say, yeah, there's a general call that goes out to everyone to repent, but it's not the effectual call. It's an outward call.

The call to the elect is an inward call. But of course we have to ask ourselves, if God has the ability to give an inward call to anyone he wants to, that means those who don't

receive it are the ones he doesn't want to receive it. Does he want them to repent or doesn't he? If he does, why doesn't he give them the inward call? If he doesn't, why does he give them an outward call? Why command people to repent if he doesn't want them to repent? And if he does want them to repent, why not make them do it since he can do that to anyone he wants to? This is a strange kind of a God that this depicts.

It's a God of Greek philosophy. It's not the God that's depicted for us in the Bible. Romans chapter 1, verse 20 and 21 says, For since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because although they knew God, they did not glorify him.

Nor were they thankful, but they became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Now this is allegedly a chapter that's talking about a person's original sin and total depravity, but these are people who became darkened. Their hearts were darkened.

That's the end of the process of darkening. It says they became futile in their thoughts. That means at one time they weren't.

These people in their lifetime once knew more than they do. They weren't in the dark. They weren't futile in their thoughts.

They made choices to go that way, which means this is not talking about a universal native condition of fallen man. In fact, it's specifically talking, in my opinion, about the Jews who knew the law and rejected it. Now most people think Romans 1 is about the Gentiles.

I won't go into that now. Listen to my lectures on Romans. You'll see why I think it's about the Jews.

That's not the most important point. The important point is, he says, these people clearly had opportunity, real opportunity to glorify God because they are without excuse for not doing so. Now I don't care what anyone says.

If you require a fish to fly and you punish it because it doesn't do that, unless it's a flying fish, of course, but if it's a goldfish, if you want it to fly, you're asking it to do what it cannot do. You cannot say, you didn't do what I said. You're without excuse.

No, the fish can say, I think I have a very good excuse. I don't have wings. It's not my nature to fly.

Don't you know what a fish is, dummy? And if God says there's a whole population out here who can't do anything good, they can't choose good, it's not in their nature to do it. It's impossible for them. He says, why aren't you guys doing good? You have no excuse



for that.

If you have no excuse, then Calvinism must be wrong because Calvinism gives a very excellent excuse why sinners don't do good. They can't. It's against their nature.

Now we might say anyone with that kind of evil nature should be put down like a rabid dog because they're evil, but you can't say they don't have an excuse. You can't say a rabid dog has no excuse for having rabies. It should just choose not to have rabies.

No, it can't do that. You've got to put it down. I'm not saying that God can't punish anyone he wants to.

He can. He can punish people who have had no real opportunity to do otherwise if he wants. I don't think he does, but he can because he's God.

He's sovereign. But one thing he can't do is say 2 plus 2 equals 5. He can't say you can't do it, but you have no excuse for not doing it. That's illogical.

It's impossible. It's a lie. God cannot deny himself that he can't say things that are just not true.

And so, this does not support the idea that men are incapable. They are without excuse if they don't. Now, what comes first, regeneration or faith? We saw a couple of verses.

One was about Lydia. God opened her heart to heed what Paul said, but that wasn't a verse about this because this is about people who are unregenerate and sinners who have no power to worship God, but God does something unilaterally that changes that in them, turns them around, makes them a different kind of person, changes their will. He didn't do anything to change the will of Lydia.

Lydia already worshipped God. It was her will to please and glorify God. That was her trajectory.

She was already living that way. For him to open her heart to understand the gospel was simply consistent with his will of his good pleasure. This is not saying that unbelievers, he has to open their hearts in that way.

Maybe he does, but that's not a verse about that. It's a verse about something else. Lydia was not an unbeliever.

She was a worshipper of God. Also, we talked about 1 John 5. Whoever believes that Jesus is Christ the Lord of God. We already talked about that.

That's not necessarily what it's saying. That's not what we need to talk about. John 1, 12-13, which we did see.

As many as received him, to them he gave power to become sons of God, even them who believe on his name, which were born of God. In that passage, it actually says who were born not of the will of men nor of the flesh, but of God. Now, is this saying that these people were born again without willing it? Without the will of man? Well, I've never known anyone who has never been saved, even in scripture.

As a matter of fact, being willing is one of the things that is always a condition. Even Calvinists believe that. They just believe God has to make you willing and then you can do it.

They believe if you're depraved and unregenerate, you can't be willing. But they don't deny that you have to be willing in order to be saved. Of course, God has to make you willing and then you can be saved.

So, the will of man is truly involved. God sands human will. Even Calvinists argue that human will is involved, but God has to give you that will.

But still, you have to be willing. So, John isn't saying that people were born without willing it. He is saying not this, but that.

And this is an example of what I sometimes have called a limited negative. And how many of you have heard me talk about limited negatives? The Bible uses a lot of them. It's a figure of speech often found in the Bible which takes the form of not A, but B. But in fact means not only A, but also B. It's common in Scripture.

Jesus said, Do not think I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. But he really did come to bring peace, did he not? He said, Peace I give unto you.

My peace I leave with you. He's the Prince of Peace. The fruit of the Spirit is peace.

Don't Christians receive peace? When he said, I didn't come to bring peace, but a sword, he means, I didn't come only to bring peace. There's another side of the coin. There's also going to be this sword.

Yes, I'll bring peace, but not just that. And this is not unusual in the Bible. Jesus said, Do not labor for the food that perishes, but labor for the food that endures to eternal life.

So, I'm not supposed to work for food? Whoever doesn't work shouldn't eat. But Jesus says, Don't work for the food that perishes. Oh, it's a command.

I can't work. Well, he means don't only work for the food that perishes. Make sure you also work for the food that endures to eternal life.

This is called a limited negative. It's not an absolute negative. It's not, absolutely don't work for the food that perishes.

Absolutely don't, you know, think I'm going to bring peace in the world. I'm not going to bring peace. Well, that's not absolute.

It's limited by this other statement. I'm also bringing a sword. You also need to labor for the food that endures.

Jesus said, When you pray, say, Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. Well, God does lead people into temptation. The Spirit of God led Jesus and the wilderness to be tempted.

And the Bible says it's inevitable. We're going to be tempted if we're led by God. But the prayer is, Don't just lead me into temptation, but deliver me from the evil one.

I know I'm going to be led into temptation, but don't let that be the end of it. It's not an absolute, Don't let me be tempted. What kind of a human would I be in the world if I'm not allowed to be tempted? That's not what I'm asking.

Don't only allow me to be tempted, but also allow me to be delivered out of it, from the evil one. I don't want to lose this battle of temptation. I don't want to be delivered into the hands of the devil and just abandoned there.

I want you to bring me through it. It's a limited negative. And there's lots of those, a lot of them in the Bible.

This, I believe, is one of them. They're not born of the flesh or the will of man. They were born of God.

Well, no, they were born of the flesh also, certainly, or else they wouldn't exist. You wouldn't be born, if you weren't born of the flesh, you wouldn't be here to be born of God. They were not only born of the flesh and of the will of man.

They were also born of God. This is what this expression means. And it's a very common device in Scripture, this limited negative.

And this certainly has to be one, because otherwise you're saying, well, they've only been born of God. They've never been born of the flesh. Really? How does this work? How does someone who's never been physically born actually get born of God? Maybe these are like aborted babies? Maybe? I don't know, but that's not what he's saying.

He's talking about Christians who were born, but their birth is not essentially relevant in terms of their physical birth. It's the fact they were born of God that's relevant. He's not eliminating human will from it, because even Calvinists know that if you eliminate human will, even if God inspires it, it's still your will.

Who else's is it if you're making the choice? Even God has to make the choice, they say. But this verse is not able to say what they want it to say, which is that human will plays

no role in salvation. Only God's will.

It's to misunderstand a Hebraism. John 3, 9 and also verses 14 and 15 says, Nicodemus answered and said to him, How can these things be? What things? What had Jesus said to Nicodemus? Anyone remember? You must be born again. You've got to be regenerated.

You've got to be born again. Nicodemus says, How? How can a man be born again? Can he enter into his mother's womb again and be born? We know he asked that question. And Jesus answered him, Here's how.

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up should not perish but have everlasting life, or eternal life. How can I be born again? What's like when Moses lifted up the serpent? What did they have to do? They had to look at the serpent and be healed. So Jesus being lifted up and whoever believes in him will be born again, will have eternal life.

You see, you gain eternal life by being born again. Nicodemus said, How can I be born again? He says, This is how. Believe.

Whoever believes will be born again. It's a condition. It's not unconditional.

It's a result. This is the opposite of the Calvinist idea that regeneration comes first. And there's plenty more like that in the scripture.

John 6, 40, Everyone who believes on him may have everlasting life. Believing is first. Having everlasting life is the result.

You gain everlasting life when you're regenerated. So if you believe, you'll be regenerated and have eternal life. John 11, 25, He that believes in me, yet shall he live.

Believing first, resulting in living, coming to life, having eternal life, being born again, passing from death into life. John 20, 31, These are written, that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ of God and that by believing you may have life in his name. Now what's coming first here? The living or the believing? In every case you believe so that you can have life.

You believe so that you'll be born again and have eternal life. That's essentially what is taught here in scripture. Acts 16, 31, To the Philippian jailer, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

He didn't say, if God saves you then you will believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. He said, you need to believe and the result will be you'll be saved. Romans 5, 2, Through whom, Christ, into this grace in which we stand and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

We have access to grace, for us to be saved and regenerated through grace. How do we

get there from here? Through faith. What's that? That's believing.

We have access by means of faith. We have access to grace. Grace is across the chasm from us and we have access to it by crossing the bridge and we have access by faith to this grace and therefore the faith has to be there before the grace is obtained or enjoyed or tapped into or whatever, benefited from.

Galatians 3, 26, For you are all children of God of course that is born again into God's family, regenerated. You are all children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. Your faith means by which you came to be children of God.

Ephesians 1, 13 In him you also trusted after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, in whom also having believed, already in the past, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Your seal of the Holy Spirit is when you are born again and the Holy Spirit is given to you and that's the seal of God's ownership on you. So when the Holy Spirit comes you are not even being sealed but that happened after you believed.

Having believed, you were sealed. The believing is first, the coming of the Holy Spirit into your life is the result. Ephesians 2, 8 By grace you have been saved through faith.

We have been regenerated and saved by grace. How did we get that? Through believing, through faith. There is not a single verse that has the result of being born again.

But there is verse after verse after verse throughout the scriptures that we receive eternal life, we are born again, we become God's children. These are all synonyms. We receive the Holy Spirit by believing.

Faith is the condition. Colossians 2, 11 and 12 is a good one because it says in him you were also buried with him in baptism in which you also were raised with him is this not regeneration? through faith You came from death to life through what means? By believing. So you had to believe while you were dead so that by believing you could come alive.

Apparently being dead in trespasses and sins which is a phrase I left out just because it was extra here it's in this passage we were dead in trespasses but we have now come from death into life through believing. So the regeneration occurred because I believe not vice versa. It goes on.

You believed, you came, raised with him through faith in the working of God who raised him from the dead and you being dead in your trespasses and uncircumcision of your flesh he has made alive together with him having forgiven you all trespasses. Now notice the phrase having forgiven you means this is something that happened earlier. He has made you alive from your dead in trespasses having previously forgiven you.

Now when are you forgiven? When you believe. Isn't justification being forgiven? Isn't

justification by faith? So he says because he has justified you by your faith clearly and he's actually said it was through faith in the earlier sentence but justification is by faith. If he has forgiven you and then makes you alive then you believed first and then were made alive second.

He has made you alive having forgiven you which is of course referring to an earlier point in the sentence in the experience. 1 Timothy 1.16 it speaks of those who should hereafter believe on him to eternal life. That is their believing on him will bring them to the state of eternal life which has got to be regeneration.

Now R.C. Sproul of course who is a Calvinist what I've just been saying he said in one of his lectures on tape that I listened to years ago he said I transcribed it he says I don't see why an Armenian even bothers to preach the gospel. He must have a lot more confidence in the power of the gospel than I have because I don't believe that the power of the gospel ever will bring repentance to a person who is not born again. In other words he says unless a person is born again the gospel will not have the power to save a person.

He doesn't believe that the power of the gospel can save anyone before they're born again. I just think he's scripturally wrong. Romans 1.16 says I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God for its salvation to everyone who believes.

Not everyone who gets regenerated first not everyone who's elect even everyone who believes that's something they do. You believe. That's your own choice, your own action.

The gospel is the power of God to salvation to those who believe to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 1 Thessalonians 1.5 For our gospel did not come to you in word only but also in power. The gospel came in power and the Holy Spirit in much assurance.

The power of the gospel is not to be trifled with. It's the power of God to save. So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God that is by hearing the gospel.

You hear the gospel then you can believe it. He doesn't say faith comes by regeneration. Faith comes by the decree of God the sovereign working of God faith comes by that no faith just comes by hearing the word of God or it doesn't come at all.

How can they call on him whom they've not heard? That's in the same context, same passage. But the point he's making is that faith comes through us hearing the word of God and obviously not rejecting it. And it saves us.

It does the supernatural work of regeneration in us. John 8, 31-32, Jesus said to those Jews who believed in him, If you abide in my word, you are my disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free. You're a slave of sin before that, but the truth will make you free.

But what do you have to do to get there? You have to first continue in his words and believe in him. That comes before you can be made free from sin. The Calvinist says, No, you're a slave of sin.

A slave can't believe. Well, this one can. The one that Jesus is talking to can.

Because they are slaves until they're set free. So you see, the next verse is, they said, We are Abram's seed. We've never been in bondage.

He said, Anyone who commits sin is a slave of sin. This is the context where Jesus says, Unbelievers are slaves of sin, but they can be set free. How? By unilateral, sovereign act of decree of God's regeneration? No, by continuing in Jesus' words, and thereby knowing the truth.

And that will make you free. There's no suggestion that the unbeliever can't do that, or that that freeing or regeneration has to happen before they can do it. Hebrews 4.2, no, no, 1 Peter 1.23 Peter says, You've been born again.

That's regeneration. Not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God, which lives and abides forever. Now, the Calvinist isn't going to deny that.

In fact, the Westminster Confession of Faith says that God sovereignly regenerates people through the word of God. And Peter says, You're born again through the word of God. It's just that he leaves out the part about the need for regeneration or a sovereign decree of God.

He just says, You've been born again by the word of God, a seed planted. If there's some mystery behind the scenes, Peter is either not aware of it or doesn't think it's important enough to talk about. He's given the impression that hearing the word of God is what resulted, essentially, in our being born again.

He doesn't give any idea that there was some secret thing going on. Now, his lack of saying so doesn't mean there wasn't. It's just that if there was, it should say so somewhere.

It's not the most obvious thing in the Bible, certainly. There's no clear statement in the Bible that says you have to be regenerated before you can believe. But there sounds like there's a lot of statements that say you have to believe to be regenerated.

In fact, it seems to be the consistent teaching of Scripture. Hebrews 4.2 says, For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them. Now, them in the context is the Jews in the wilderness who didn't go into the promised land when they should have.

But the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it. He didn't say the word didn't profit them because they were not elect. The

word didn't profit them because God didn't regenerate them when he could have.

He says the problem was they didn't mix it with faith. It wasn't mixed with faith in them. They heard the word, but there was no faith response on their part, and so it didn't benefit them.

The word of God is the power of God's salvation. Arminians agree salvation is supernatural. People can't save themselves.

They need to be saved by God. They need to be regenerated. Where we differ is that Arminians say people can actually do that.

People can actually choose to believe. In fact, they're required to, and they'll be held responsible and punished if they don't. Michaelis says no, they can't.

God has to do all that. The Bible doesn't tell us so anywhere. Not one verse, except a couple of disputed ones about Lydia and about whoever believes is born of God.

Those are definitely ambiguous, and I said that there's a better way of understanding them even in their immediate context. But apart from those, you really don't have verses saying people have to be regenerated, and those verses don't say it either. So we got a ton of verses saying you have to believe to be saved and to be born again and to have life.

Not one clear verse on the other side. And yet it's fundamental to Calvinism. This point that cannot be established from Scripture and is in fact contradicted by Scripture.

Okay, we already talked about this next point. How can one who is dead in trespasses and sins believe in God? We talked about that in our last lecture. We can gladly pass over that now and get to Roman numeral five, and we're definitely coming down the finish line here.

Does anyone seek God? This is important because we pointed out that in Romans 3, 9 through 12, where Paul quotes those psalms and that line from Isaiah about the Jews, how none does good, none follows God, none seeks God. It's very important to the Calvinists to underscore in those verses, there is none that seeks God. Now what they think Paul is saying is there are none of the unregenerate who seek God.

Certainly Calvinists know that Paul was a seeker of God, and David was a seeker of God, whom he's quoting. And Isaiah was a seeker of God. All those lines about how evil people were, were written by people who did seek God.

David, Isaiah, Paul. Calvinists are not blind. They know very well.

Of course there are people that seek God. But their argument is only regenerate people seek God. Unregenerate people are described as those who none do good, none seek



God.

Now you might notice if you read the passage, there is no word regenerate or unregenerate in Paul's passage, nor any equivalent or anything that even remotely raises those concepts in his passage. When David said those things, Isaiah said those things, they never indicated, they were just talking about a class of people who are unregenerate, as opposed to themselves who were regenerate. That's not, as far as we know, the theology of David, or of Isaiah, or even Paul.

If it is, he doesn't say so. That's an importation, that's an eisegesis. What is literally said, if we're going to take just what it says, and not see any hyperbole in it at all, it's just saying there's not a person on the planet who does good.

In fact, in Psalm 14 it says, God looks down on the children of men, human beings in general, to see if any do good. There's none. No one's doing good.

He doesn't say except for the regenerate. He does, however, make it clear that he's not speaking absolutely. He's using hyperbole.

He says there is another group, the generation of the righteous, but it doesn't say that they're regenerate. As far as we know, they just made different choices. There is nothing in any of these passages that specifically gives any support to a Calvinist doctrine.

What it does say, of course, is that, and I believe using hyperbole, people aren't seeking God anymore. People aren't doing good anymore. They should, but they don't.

This is a bad time we're living in. Bad society. There's some few exceptions, but for the most part, you just don't see it anymore.

People seeking God. That's what David's saying, and Paul is not saying something else when he quotes David. He's saying the same thing.

There are people who seek God. Not all of them are already regenerated. The Bible does not make a distinction when it talks about people who do and people who do not seek God.

It never makes the distinction in the context anywhere. This person was regenerated. That's why he sought God.

This person was not regenerated. That's why he didn't seek God. But look at this list of scriptures here.

Actually, there's a quote from Douglas Wilson I want to give you. Douglas Wilson, in his *Back to Basics, Calvinist*, says, if the words in Romans, and he's talking about the words I was just discussing in Romans 3, if the words in Romans 3 mean anything, not one unregenerate person has ever sought God. Not one.

Now, I think that's claiming way too much because the words of Romans 3 certainly mean something, and it's going too far to say if they mean anything, they mean what I want them to mean. Because what I want them to mean is that no unregenerated person has ever sought God. But they might not mean that because they don't say that.

It is possible that they mean something, but they don't mean that. They could mean, in fact, what they say. And they could mean something consistent with Paul's thought processes and what he's arguing.

It's possible they mean something, but not what you're saying, Doug Wilson. This is not the only possibility. It's not even the best possibility.

It's the only one Calvinists have ever considered because they've been taught this is a proof text for our point. Can they read Romans without that paradigm in their head? Maybe not. So they say, if it means anything, it means what I'm saying.

That means I can't think of anything else it could possibly mean, which means you don't have much imagination. You haven't really thought critically about it very much, have you? You're just saying so. You're saying, I've never heard a meaning or cannot even think of a meaning except the Calvinist meaning.

Well, you have a very limited range of thinking on this because I can think of at least a couple other possible meanings that aren't Calvinist. But really, to say that it means no unregenerate person has ever sought God and to insert, as he does, the word unregenerate is to suggest that the passage says something about unregenerate people, which it doesn't mention. How can you say, if this means anything, it means something it doesn't say? Maybe it means what it does say and not what it doesn't say.

And this is a little upsetting me when I'm debating with a Calvinist and they make statements like that. Come on, let's get real. The Calvinist paradigm is not the only paradigm you can superimpose on the scriptures, the grid.

You read it through a Calvinist grid and you can only see the Calvinist way. That's not the only way that's there. Deuteronomy 4.29 says, If you shall seek the Lord your God, you shall find him, if you seek him with all your heart.

Who's he talking to? Any Jew. Israel. Are they all regenerate? Certainly not.

Some were, some were not, perhaps. I don't think they're regenerate, but they were not all believers. Some were of the believing remnant and some were not.

That's always been the case in Israel from the days of Moses. Actually, from the days of Abraham, as Paul points out in Romans 9, which we'll get to sometime here. That'll be fun.

Romans 9. Anyway, if you seek him, he will be found by you. 2 Chronicles 15.2 says, Jeremiah 29.13, You shall seek me and find me when you shall search for me with all your heart. Hebrews 11.6, God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him.

2 Chronicles 15.4, When they did turn unto the Lord, they sought him, and he was found of them. 2 Chronicles 15.15, All Judas sought him with their whole desire, and he was found of them. 2 Chronicles 19.3, Spoken to a person, You have prepared your heart to seek God.

Oh, a person prepared his own heart to seek God? I thought only God could do that. 2 Chronicles 34.3, He began to seek after the God of David, his father. Psalm 34.4, I sought the Lord, and he heard me.

Now, of course, the Calvinists are going to say about all these cases, Well, yeah, the regenerate do that. Yeah, but there's nothing in any of these passages that distinguishes between a regenerate and a non-regenerate. It just tells us that there are people who seek God, just like there are people who don't seek God.

Certainly, you can't insert the word regenerate in any of these passages without eisegesis. And you can't insert the word unregenerate in Romans 3, where there's none that seeks after God, without eisegesis. We can't force the passage to mean something just because we have a theological paradigm to support.

Now, Acts 17.11-12 says, These, the Bereans, when they heard the gospel from Paul, they were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and they searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore, many of them believed. They certainly weren't saved before they believed, but what led to their believing? Well, they searched the Scriptures.

Were they seeking God? Sounds like it. Why did they search the Scriptures when others didn't? The Thessalonians didn't. Why did the Bereans? Because they were better in their hearts.

They were noble-minded. They were more noble-minded than the Thessalonians. When the Calvinist says, You can't say there was something better in you that made you get saved than was in that person who didn't get saved.

Well, Luke can say it. Luke can say, The Thessalonians, they weren't noble-minded. The Bereans, they were.

And they were before they believed. They were before they were Christians. To say that every unregenerate person is a hater of God simply doesn't fit the facts.

These people weren't yet believers in Christ, but they were noble-minded, and they searched the Scriptures and believed. Acts 10 verses 1-4 is even better. There was a

certain man of Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion, a Gentile, of what was called the Italian Regiment.

A devout man. Now, he didn't know about Jesus yet. He was not regenerated.

But he was already a devout man, one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people and prayed to God always. Now, is this just a surface hypocritical religion that doesn't please God? No. About the ninth hour of the day, he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God coming and saying to him, Cornelius, your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God.

Here's a non-Christian man worshipping God in his ignorance, unregenerate, and what happens? God says, I like what you're doing. You're a pious man. You're a God-fearing man.

I'm going to send a preacher to you so you can become a Christian man. This is not a man who's regenerated. But he's not totally depraved.

He's not incapable of seeking God. Now, of course, Calvinists would say, well, regeneration may be a process, not an instant. God was beginning to regenerate him, which led to him being pious and so forth.

I don't know of any place in the Bible that talks about regeneration as a process. It's a birth. It's a passing from death and life.

It could be a process. The Bible never says so. But the Bible does say that no one comes to Christ unless the Father draws him.

Calvinists like that verse, and so do I. This man, no doubt, was being drawn by God to Christ. But he hadn't gotten there yet. And he was not unutterably wicked.

He was a good guy. And the Bible doesn't have any problems saying so. The biblical writers weren't Calvinists.

They weren't beholden to a doctrine of total depravity. So they can artlessly and quite innocently say, he was a good man. He wasn't a Christian, but he was a good man.

You see, our Orthodox says, we can't say there's any good man. Remember that Rabbi Kirshner who wrote *Why Bad Things Happen to Good People?* His best-selling book back in the 80s. He was not a Christian.

He was a Jew. And he's trying to explain from the book of Job why bad things happen to good people. Well, many Christians from the other titles say there's a good reason.

I can answer that. There are no good people. Bad things don't happen to good people because there are no good people.

These were dutiful Calvinists saying, there's no one good. No, not one. But is that what the Bible says? Wasn't Cornelius a good man? Certainly not good enough to be saved by his own works.

No one is good enough to be saved by their works. We're not going to the polar opposite of Calvinism. Calvin says nothing they do is good.

Can't be good. And we're not arguing the opposite. Everything people do is good and everyone's okay with God.

No, there's a mixture. People are fallen. They're damaged.

But the thing that's damaged is something made in the image of God. And that has not been totally obliterated. The image of God has been marred but not obliterated.

There's still something of a heart toward God in many people who are not yet found Him. And to say otherwise is simply to say something that's jargon that's said in loyalty to a theological system. It doesn't agree with the Bible.

Isaiah 55 6 says, Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near. I gave you this verse earlier.

What I said is, it sounds like he's saying there's a time when seeking God will avail and a time when it won't. You better do it now while it will work. But if you're not elect, there will never be a time when you can seek the Lord.

And if you are elect, any time will do because you're going to find Him anyway. It's been determined. This sounds like it's saying there's opportunities that people have to seek God.

They might miss those opportunities. In which case, it might not be good for them. They might, in fact, not have another opportunity like this.

But it sounds like they are given an opportunity that isn't always there. And it doesn't sound like the seeking of God is left to God making it happen in them. He's given them a chance right now.

It sounds like there's an opportunity here. Take it or leave it. 2 Chronicles 11, 16 After the Levites left, those from whom all the tribes of Israel such as set their hearts to seek the Lord.

I didn't read that right. Those people who set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel, they came to Jerusalem. They set their hearts.

Calvinist says, no, only God can change your heart to make you seek Him. Well, they did something. They prepared their hearts.

They set their hearts to seek God. 2 Chronicles 12, 14 And Rehoboam did evil, because he did not prepare his heart to seek the Lord. Okay.

Some do, some don't. 2 Chronicles 15, 12 Then they entered into a covenant to seek the God of their fathers with all their hearts. 2 Chronicles 20, 3 Jehoshaphat feared and said himself to seek the Lord.

And proclaimed to fast throughout all Judah. Hosea 10, 12 Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till He comes and rains righteousness on you. You seek first, and then He comes and rains His grace on you.

It's time. Break up your hard-hearted ground. You see, all these statements make it clear that people can and are told to seek God.

Not one of these passages ever mentions that the people spoken to are or are not regenerated. In my opinion, in the Old Testament, no one was. Calvinists think they were, because they have to acknowledge that some people did seek the Lord, and their view is no one can do that unless they're regenerated.

So they take the doctrine of regeneration back to the Old Testament, too. Which is, of course, necessary for them to do. But it's not in the Scripture.

It doesn't say that. It's a necessity of their system. Now, just one more point, and we're done with this subject.

Why does God have to harden people's hearts, or blind sinners, if they're already blind and dead, every last one of them to a man? In John 12, 40, it says of the Jews, God has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they should see with their eyes, lest they should understand with their hearts, and turn, so that I should heal them. Now, these are people who are under God's judicial blinding. They were under God's judgment, just like Pharaoh was when God hardened his heart.

This is a generation that had rejected Christ, rejected God, and he blinded them as a judgment. That's what Paul says in Romans chapter 11. The elect of Israel have come into righteousness, but the rest were blinded.

Jesus, when he was asked by his disciples, why do you speak to people in parables? Implied that the people don't really understand these parables, why do you use them? He said, because to you it is given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven. To them it is not given. That seeing they may see and not perceive, hearing they may hear and not understand, lest they should turn and be healed.

Quoting the same verse from Isaiah 6 that John here is quoting. Jesus makes it very clear that Israel in his day was under judicial judgment. There was a faithful remnant that already were serving God when he arrived and God sent them over to him and they

became disciples.

The rest were obstinate apostate Israel and they were under God's judgment, soon to be destroyed by the Romans. But they were like Pharaoh. Before God actually snuffed him, he hardened his heart so that he'd go through some judgment process before he actually died.

This generation went through a judgment process too before the Romans came and wiped them out. That process began with God blinding them so they wouldn't repent. The ones who were already rebellious.

But why would he have to do that? It makes it sound like he's afraid they might repent if he doesn't proactively blind them. I thought they couldn't. If God doesn't want them to repent and countenance to do it, all he has to do is exactly nothing.

Because if he doesn't make them repent, they can't anyway. If he wants to keep them from repenting, why does he proactively do something to make them not repent? That's a hard question, I think, for Calvin to answer. Romans 9.18 says, Therefore he has mercy on whom he wills, and whom he wills he hardens.

Calvinists think that everyone who is unregenerate is in the hardened category. But the Bible doesn't say that. A few people in the Bible, it says that God hardened them.

And Paul's specifically thinking of Pharaoh, which is one of the unusual cases. But why does he have to harden Pharaoh? If Pharaoh couldn't make the right decision, couldn't repent without being regenerated, couldn't God just withhold regeneration and do nothing at all? Why does he frequently blind people, harden people, when in fact the Calvinist says they're all in that condition already? Then what's left for God to do, to blind or harden them? Obviously the Bible indicates that God blinds some people who were not otherwise blind. He hardens some people who were not otherwise hardened.

And he does so, so that they won't repent, which they might otherwise have done. To my mind, there's no reasonable answer from the Augustinian paradigm to explain why God would have to do such a thing if Calvinism is true. He wouldn't have to harden anyone or blind anyone.

That's the condition everybody's in unless he makes them otherwise. So again, the wording of Scripture, again and again and again, does not talk as if any Scriptural writers were Calvinists. Even the verses that kind of sound like they are, really you look at them in context and they don't sound so much like they are.

But there's a ton of Scriptures that sound very much like they're not. We're done with this lecture. We're done with the total depravity.